

**Transcribed Public Comments from Best Practices Public Forum
January 5, 2009 – City Council Chambers**

1

- Revise Council rules to encourage more citizen interaction.
- Have Councilors, others respond to specific comments by citizens as reflected in minutes.
- Public comment session after motions is amended.
- Council-as-whole meetings
- Council creating ad hoc committee

#2

- City School- open enrollment
- How things are done (city school) vs. how things should be done (best practices)
- Cooperation needed between Mayor's office & CC

#3

- Public access to all budgets, funds etc.
- DPW budget should be open to public view
- Examination of "quasi-public agencies" (e.g. Forbes)

#4

- Explore possibilities of interactive web site
- Contact/Info person for each committee.
- Intern program @ local colleges
- Search Bar on website.
- Ad hoc committee to review website
- Scanning all planning documents.

#5

- Support as is. Last bullet.

#6

- RFP process should be open, transparent.
- Clarity between decision making vs. policy setting.
- Relationship between Planning & Mayor's office should be clearer-more objective.
e.g. Independent legal council.

#7

- * no comments

#8

- Need for committee to advance recommendations as well as continue role of watchdog.
- Place where citizens can bring grievance.

#9

- * Reconsider in-house City Solicitor.

Transcribed by Lisa DePiano

Draft Best Practices Recommendations Public Forum Summary
January 5, 2009 – City Council Chambers

The Best Practice Committee held a forum Jan 5 2009, to hear public reaction to the Draft Recommendations submitted to City Council December 4. The event drew 8 citizens and 5 Committee members who extended the conversation on a number of issues.

- #1 There was support for fostering open public debate on issues particularly with the City Council. It was suggested that Council find ways to respond to public comment or create specific meetings for that dialogue. It was urged that additional time for public comments be allowed after amendments are accepted.
- #2 It was suggested that open enrollment for City School allowing residents to attend selected sessions would appeal to a wider group.
- #3 There was support for education and transparency around all aspects of city budgeting. Also sunlight budgets and meetings of quasi-city entities like the Academy Of Music and the Forbes Library.
- #4 There were many suggestions for low cost improvements for the city website including adding a goggle search bar; listing a contact person for every city committee; and creating a volunteer committee to review and update the site. It was suggested that the planning dept. scan new documents as they are submitted to keep files up-to-date.
- #5 Develop clear guideline for appointing special municipal employees to serve on city boards.
- #6 A belief expressed by many that the Planning Department should not be making Policy for the city. That by staffing many city committees the OPD had too much influence; that the administrative side of the city was implementing policy without ongoing public conversation and debate. Also that OPD should seek public review before RFPs of any kind are issued.
- #7 No comments.
- #8 Concerns and questions were raised about how best practice recommendations will be implemented. There was general support for the creation of a committee charged with providing a public forum for an ongoing review of city process. It was suggested that we develop a process to reconcile citizen complaints that would keep the city out of court.
- #9 There was support for City Council access to independent legal advise and the suggestion that the city consider creating a legal department rather than contracting out for that service. It was pointed out that the council has no budget and very limited access to staff support.
- #10 There was support for changes that would give City Council more control of its meetings. By chairing the meeting the Mayor can control the pace and timing of debate and undermines the checks and balances city council should provide.

Summary by Alex Ghiselin

Public Forum on Draft Best Practice Recommendations

Monday, January 5, 2009 – 7:00 PM - City Council Chambers

[illegible]

Public Comments from Best Practices Public Forum

February 11, 2009

The forum was held at the JFK Middle School Community Room. Committee members sat in a semi-circle behind desks with the public in rows in front of them. Copies of the recommendations were provided as well as projected onto a screen in front of the room. The forum was opened and the public was asked to comment on the recommendations set forth by the committee. The committee clarified questions from the public and a dialog began. A large pad of paper was set out in front of the room and one committee member recorded comments from the public. The forum was also attended by members of the press.

A video recording of the event can be found at

<http://northassoc.org/2009/02/20/best-practices-forum-02-11-2009-video.aspx>

The list below is the transcribed public comment from the forum:

General Comments about Recommendations-

Who gets to decide what happens and how?

Is this making the process harder? More delays

Have Guidelines for committee (new members)

Not everyone has Internet

Space for non-city committees to meet

Think of out of the box ways for public participation

Timed agendas- how is this determined how to people know how much (time)

Recommendation # 1

1. Restart Process- how will you know if this is necessary
2. New ways to hold public hearings- too formal
3. Accessibility-make sure room is suitable for hearing disabilities
4. Make sure there is an oversight committee to make sure it happens
5. Watchdog committee to communicate with public and reach out early on in the process

6. People who may not be on boards/committees ways for them to be involved
7. Participatory democracy- open system not what the city can teach you
8. Include the arts committee
9. How to communicate with the public about existing resources
10. Stakeholders-who are they, how do you communicate with them,
11. flow of information-get out agendas with detailed information to residents before the meetings use email lists
12. Get out Notification procedures to residents about zoning changes, road projects
13. Use neighborhood associations every ward could have one, they could work with the councilor from that ward.
14. Have another committee to follow up- have representation from neighborhood associations
15. Citizen participation training- how to hold neighborhood councils, have people pay for the program through paid staff, have continual outreach/contact
16. People respond when they are asked to come face to face
17. Use WXOJ radio to communicate
18. How do you hold government accountable?
19. Who is the City?
20. Have implementation (of BP recommendations) be a two way street b/t citizens and City 1. Assign to city councilors and subcommittees 2. Hold special council meeting to talk about recommendations
21. Citizens taking responsibility (for implementations of rec)
22. Awareness that these recommendations exists, alert citizens, have liaisons go to meetings and make sure they are implementing recommendations
23. City School is not accessible to most people, it needs more flexibility
24. Citizen outreach- we need people out in the community physically delivering information
25. How do you incorporate people who "walk in" late to meetings
26. Budget Road show- more of it. Memo for public understanding aside from forum i.e. amount city contributes to BID
27. How do we get out to people who are not already involved

28. Committees work with newspaper for more coverage
29. Use league of woman voters to get out the citizens guidebook
30. Incorporate city school for public school system

Recommendation # 5

31. Have committee members take the information out to the public
32. Committees have clear job descriptions draw people into committees recruit
33. Open Meeting Laws- understand it, prevents discussion reform law.
34. Use City website- have link for committees have job description
35. Have book for new committee members- already exists for arts council as model they have term limits
36. Multiple positions- get rid out- more participation, broader participation, no term limits
37. List legal requirements for public hearings define terms
38. Guide to zoning/planning terms
39. Look at relationships to Smith College and the City- do a case study on this, have town/gown committee
40. Look at the way the recommendations are written City and citizens work together. Not imposed by the city to the public. Write them as a call to action, change language
41. Look at redistricting to include neighborhoods do not fragment
42. Make sure there is a response that citizens can be heard taken serious
43. Think more about the city as a whole do not let ward boundaries fragment us

Recommendation #6

44. Great idea

COMPILATION OF WRITTEN COMMENTS ON DRAFT BEST PRACTICES RECOMMENDATIONS

Hello members of the best practices committee,

I just wanted to write and express my appreciation for the work you have all done, and that the recommendations that are going forth in the draft report are a complete and comprehensive list and that it reflects those issues and concerns that were raised through this process. The draft report casts a very wide net in its scope and at every point along the way from the beginning of this process until the present there has been ample opportunity for public participation and input.

I hope that the members of the city council examine all of the recommendations and understand the meaning and thought behind each of those recommendations. I also hope that in some form or another that the city council addresses or adopts all of the recommendations to the extent that is feasible.

Thank you

Jesus Levy

A comment - I believe that any project no matter how small that will impact a neighborhood, should always be announced online and in the newspaper and by mail to every neighborhood resident within 10 miles of that project before it is approved so that the residents may be part of the planning and comment period. We should not have situations where we wake up one day and find that huge housing estates have suddenly been planted without our knowledge a mile down the road, significantly impacting traffic flow and pollution levels in our neighborhoods, not to mention property values - either creating gentrification in a neighborhood, or depressing house prices by creating a mass of unsold stock (i.e. in this climate.) All planning that impacts a neighborhood should be transparent and available and easy to find.

In addition, any industrial or business building or planning must include much more public input - and neighborhoods have to be confident that zoning rules will be followed by businesses. (As they often are not as we have experienced to our detriment in our neighborhood of North Main in Florence.) This is especially important in these neighborhoods referred to in Northampton planning lingo as 'mixed use.' It sounds very good on paper - but often means that working class neighborhoods will bear the brunt of the mixed use situation - that means extra traffic, noise, and air pollution from businesses which in my daily experience seems difficult to nearly impossible to regulate in the town of Northampton. If we are to have 'mixed use' areas in Northampton, all income areas should share the joy, not just the lower income areas. And then perhaps zoning and air quality regulations would actually be adhered to.

Thank you,

Pan Welland
81 North Main St. Florence, 01062

I wanted to send you my comments on the draft report. I don't have James' email address, and I am not sure I have the most recent email address for Wendy or Lisa. I would appreciate if you could forward my comments on whomever didn't receive them.

I have only two comments:

1. I support the recommendation for an independent review of the Office of Planning and Development. I have served on three college accreditation site visit teams charged with performing an independent review of college planning programs and I know how effective the process can be. My office started developing a self-study three years ago when we discussed this very idea with the Mayor (a self-study is typically the first step in an independent review), but we stopped when it was clear that the resources were not available. I think, however, that the recommendation would be more useful if you provided a great context for it:
 - a. DPW and Fire Department have had independent reviews by an outside consultant, the Assessors by a process I am not familiar with, the School Department, Libraries, and Police Department all go through periodic accreditation, the Auditors, Treasurer, and Finance Director all get some of the same by the annual audit and management review letter.

- b. Any review needs to be comprehensive enough, aware of financial and resource constraints, and made up of experts in the field in order to be a full and fair review.
- 2. Most of your recommendations require financial and other resources. When I met with your subcommittee, I thought that I heard that this would be more clearly acknowledged and ideally quantified in the report. While I like most, although on all, of your recommendations, I think that it is a mistake and a disservice to your readers if you do not to quantify the resources that each task consumes more clearly. It is too easy for the public to support the recommendations without acknowledging the tradeoffs necessary. What can the city not do if we do this?

I don't know how you will show comments in your final report, but I am happy for my comments to be included in the report.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment and for all your hard work.

Wayne Feiden, FAICP, Director of Planning and Development

The main comment I have has to do with a bullet point under the First recommendation. It begins with "slow down or restart the decision-making process" when there is lack of public response. I would like to point out there are many issues that Boards and Committees make decisions on that the public may not be interested in; if the public does not respond, I am concerned that delaying the process may work against "efficient government". Not all decisions need to wait until there is 'public interest'.

Rosemary Schmidt
Board of Public Works

Hello to the members of the best practices committee,

I would like to make the suggestion that as a part of the feedback process for the recommendations that perhaps what you might want to ask the public to do is sign for them, like a petition, gauge how many people are willing to sign support for the recommendations as a whole or any number of individual recommendations.

I think it was already identified during the course of the meeting

that the committee was not likely to be able to process too much more feedback and that you have already created a product. However it seems that the committee is struggling to identify the need for something more than just presenting the recommendations as they are to the city council. this adds priority and public support to the recommendations as well as continues the conversation

Jesus Levya

(SUBMITTED BY WENDY FOXMYN)

MEMORANDUM FOR THE HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

SUBJECT: Transparency and Open Government

My Administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government. We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration. Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government.

Government should be transparent. Transparency promotes accountability and provides information for citizens about what their Government is doing. Information maintained by the Federal Government is a national asset. My Administration will take appropriate action, consistent with law and policy, to disclose information rapidly in forms that the public can readily find and use. Executive departments and agencies should harness new technologies to put information about their operations and decisions online and readily available to the public. Executive departments and agencies should also solicit public feedback to identify information of greatest use to the public.

Government should be participatory. Public engagement enhances the Government's effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions. Knowledge is widely dispersed in society, and public officials benefit from having access to that dispersed knowledge. Executive departments and agencies should offer Americans increased opportunities to participate in policymaking and to provide

their Government with the benefits of their collective expertise and information. Executive departments and agencies should also solicit public input on how we can increase and improve opportunities for public participation in Government.

Government should be collaborative. Collaboration actively engages Americans in the work of their Government. Executive departments and agencies should use innovative tools, methods, and systems to cooperate among themselves, across all levels of Government, and with nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individuals in the private sector. Executive departments and agencies should solicit public feedback to assess and improve their level of collaboration and to identify new opportunities for cooperation.

I direct the Chief Technology Officer, in coordination with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Administrator of General Services, to coordinate the development by appropriate executive departments and agencies, within 120 days, of recommendations for an Open Government Directive, to be issued by the Director of OMB, that instructs executive departments and agencies to take specific actions implementing the principles set forth in this memorandum. The independent agencies should comply with the Open Government Directive.

This memorandum is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity by a party against the United States, its departments, agencies, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.

This memorandum shall be published in the Federal Register.

BARACK OBAMA

To the Best Practices Committee

I will be brief, as I have had very limited time to review your recommendations. I will be on vacation on February 11 and I am therefore submitting this comment by email. If time permits, I will try to do a more thorough review that covers more of your points.

I think that one of the problems we have in Northampton is that we have too

many committees and too few qualified people who have the time to serve on these committees. Public attention is splintered in too many directions, and the Best Practices Committee, as well-intended, hard-working, and dedicated as it is, represents a further splintering of this attention. I think that accounts for the poor attendance at your meetings, especially with hot issues like the landfill, North Street development, Hospital Hill, and the City's budget crisis consuming people's attention. Therefore, I would hope that the BP committee's recommendations would help put more order into the bewildering welter of public processes that are ongoing.

One thing that is missing from the BP recommendations is a clear and effective way to deal with this splintering of public attention. The biggest dysfunction in our local government is that well-meaning public officials go through all of the motions of involving people in good faith (as the BP committee did), people don't show up, decisions are made, and then the public complains that they weren't involved. We have to find a way to stop this cycle. Part of the problem is that, rather than there being too little information, there is far too much, and far too much of it is "noise." We need to hone our public information process so that what is truly important gets the attention it deserves.

I think there needs to be a conscious effort by SOMEONE to monitor all of the things that are going on and flag for public attention those that are either especially important or that could become important in the foreseeable future, so that people's attention is focused on what matters, with sufficient lead time to get the public involved. Recommendation 2, third bullet, does attempt to deal with this problem with its recommendation of a "public information" staff position, but I think that it should be emphasized more strongly and should not just be subsumed under the overall process of educating the public generally about local government. There is also a serious risk that this function could degenerate into a "public relations" person whose main job is to "sell" what the City is doing, to justify its actions, and to just pay lip service to the public rather than to notify the public about what is important and to listen to what people have to say. I think that maybe something more like an "ombudsman" may be appropriate, a person who is independent and does not report to the Mayor, and whose job is to dig things out and alert the public to matters that might otherwise go unnoticed or unreported.

Thank you for your attention to my comment and for your fine work on behalf of Northampton. I hope to write more if I can find the time.

Sincerely,

Joel Russell, 25 Kensington Avenue

There is a danger in having a list this long without a focus. My suggestion is that you make a sublist of the top priority items, or in the alternative, create some kind of ranking system for this extensive list.

Doug Kohl

Dear Best Practices Committee,

Here are a few comments about the draft recommendations your committee has produced. I am very impressed and congratulate you for a job well done. That said, I think producing this document has been the easy part of the work. Implementation will be much more difficult, primarily because of a lack of resources. To give a quick real-life explanation of this point: the two most comprehensive sets of minutes come from the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) and the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). The CPC has dedicated administrative money which allows it to employ not just one, but two staff members. The minutes for the CAC are done by Corinne in the mayor's office. But similar resources are not available, as far as I know, for other city boards and committees. My own view is that without comprehensive minutes are a good thing, as opposed to minutes which only list motions and votes.

I have also included comments within the body of the recommendations below.

JACK HORNOR

- 1. Develop written protocols for conducting various types of public meetings for City committees, departments, and other decision-making bodies. Consider the following:**

Publicly posting for each year a list of all regularly scheduled meetings and making an easy-to-understand, timed agenda available to the public prior to each one.

"available to the public" is the key phrase here – available how and at what cost?

Making the rules governing committees and their processes available to the public.

Informing the public, especially key stakeholders, about specific meeting agenda items that could have significant community impact. **"informing the public" – again, how and at what cost? (note – having made this point twice, I will not continue, but it applies to a number of your other recommendations)**

Developing online or through meeting sign-up sheets a contact list of residents who have expressed interest in receiving information about the work of a committee.

Yes – committee listservs is a great idea

- 2. The City should assume an ongoing responsibility for explaining the detailed functions and processes of municipal government. Consider the following:**

Collaborate with neighborhood groups/associations to maximize education and

communication. I think it would be a good idea for each Ward to have a Committee.

Provide a standard, comprehensive orientation and training for all committee appointees. I think this should be the responsibility of each committee, as I doubt whether a standard orientation is feasible. Perhaps part of the orientation could be standard, and part specific to a board or committee.

4. **The City of Northampton should improve its website to be more user-friendly, ensure greater consistency in the posting of public documents (e.g. agendas, minutes, committee reports, etc.), and increase its overall effectiveness for public communication. Consider the following:**

An easily accessible calendar function listing meetings of all Northampton governmental bodies with links to supporting documents, minutes and current agendas. Yes – the current online calendar has been very difficult for the CPC to work with. It is the opposite of user friendly.

5. **Review and, if necessary, revise current procedures for making appointments to City committees, boards, commissions, and other positions to ensure that the process is clear, consistent, and democratic and that appointments reflect the diversity of the community. Consider the following:**

Inform the public in advance about board vacancies and develop an ongoing outreach process to recruit a pool of applicants reflective of the diversity of the community. More important to inform the public than to develop a pool. The latter brings with it the risk of people believing that the deck is stacked in favor of the pool – and by the way, who would decide who gets to be in the pool and who doesn't?

The City Council exercising greater oversight of the appointments process via its Committee on Appointments and Evaluations. What exactly does this mean? Would an amendment to the ordinance governing this committee be in order? And if so, what would it recommend?

6. **Commission an independent review of the Office of Planning and Development. Consider the following:**

Other major departments (DPW, Fire Department, Assessors, etc.) have greatly benefited from similar external reviews, serving to affirm their strengths and constructively identify areas for improvement. I think this is a critical point to make.

7. **Create a Vision/Mission Statement for city government that prioritizes citizen engagement and participation, ethical behavior, and best practices in**

Adopt a local public ethics ordinance similar to those currently being developed for state government and in other municipalities. Do we have an ethics problem?

8. Designate a standing committee to continue the work begun by the Ad Hoc Committee on Best Practices to improve city decision-making and promote public participation. Consider the following:

Review and revise the currently unutilized “Citizens Advisory Committee” ordinance established under Chapter 22, Article II of the Northampton Code of Ordinances and revitalize the CAC.

Create a permanent Best Practices Committee that could conduct public outreach and, ongoing research, and make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council. *Why two committees? It seems to me that these two pieces fit well together.*

9. Review City Council rules and procedures, and City ordinances, in relationship to best practices goals and guidelines. Consider the following

Review Council Rules, including alternative approaches to facilitating public comment and feedback at City Council meetings. *I recognize that the Council meetings are already long (although I do wonder why every order has to be read aloud – is that a requirement or is for the TV coverage?), but I find public comment very frustrating. There must be a better way.*

10. Initiate a comprehensive review of the City Charter both to see if general modernization of the document is warranted and to examine several areas of expressed public concern about our current structure of government.

Consider the following: *I am assuming that just because some people expressed concern, that did not automatically put a concern into this document. I really hope that the committee listened to the concerns, discussed them, and made decisions about which to include.*

The role of the Mayor in City Council and School Committee meetings (e.g. chairing meetings, setting agendas, etc.)

City Council powers and responsibilities.

Committee composition and appointment authority.

Term-limits for elected officials

Dear Best Practices Committee,

February 10, 2009

I would like to comment about an area that I think should be included in best practices. I have had a chance to review the recommendations you will bring to the city council. I don't see this area of concern addressed or maybe I have missed it. I will not bore you with the details of my situation, but can briefly describe the issue and would be glad to talk in detail about this but it's too complex to write all the information in an email.

My situation started in September of 2003, I have had many conversations with the

Office of Planning and Development and the Building Commissioners office regarding a buffer that was removed behind my home on 15 W. Center Street in Florence. I followed the process thoroughly, attending all meetings, this went to the land court and the Justice made his ruling. Many appeals were decided in this land court case. Some were in favor of the developer and some in my favor. I won the case for a better buffer, and the Building Commissioner erred in his decision making back in 2003. No party, the City, the developer or my self appealed the Justices rulings. The Justices ruling was April 7, 2008.

I have contacted the Office of Planning and Development on 7/21/08, 8/12/08, 8/22/08, and 1/6/09 to find out when the better buffer would be installed.

The Office of Planning and Development has been telling me that the developer is going to submit a new amended buffer plan. I have not seen a new plan or heard of any meeting for this. The parties had an opportunity to appeal the land court decision if they were not satisfied with the Justices decision. Why now does the developer have an opportunity to amend the buffer plan that the ZBA and Justice at Land court ruled on? Why is the ruling not being enforced? Why are there no letters to comply? Why are there no fines implemented?

The enforcement letter should have gone out 30 days from the Justices ruling to allow for the appeal process. The buffer should have been planted in spring, summer or even the fall of 2008. The city has not followed through. In the beginning the Building Commission threatened, in a letter to the developer that fines would be instituted, but it never happened. The ZBA said they agreed with the Building Commission about not collecting fines, and that replanting would be a better outcome. To that end there are no fines, no new buffer and no pressure to install one. If fines where being charged, it would give incentive to the developer to finish this mess that was his own creation, and the city would benefit from the extra dollars. My point is what is a threat if the city never follows through...?

Sincerely,
Loretta Gougeon

586-3951

Best Practices Committee,

Really great work. Very gently and clearly written. I really like that many of the recommendations are easy to implement and overlap. While there are some difficult recommendations, many can be accomplished quickly by a technology or procedural change.

I have some changes/additions to Recommendation # 5 (the additions would be to you're bullets).

The first is to better clarify basic requirements for Committee/Board jobs and empower committees to let go of board members and move on.

Committee on Disabilities has had some members not show for months. We have no clear policies from the city on how to address these absences. Seats can be tied up in this way for long periods of time.

Having clear job descriptions from the start would greatly help with managing committees. The Ward 3 Neighborhood Association has developed Job Descriptions to clarify our board member duties. I have attached a copy.

The second is to identify basic competencies required for a particular board or committee WITH an emphasis on developing membership that can take the discussion to the community. City committees and boards are full of people who show up and go home. Not only are committee/board members experts but city representatives, and they need to promote the flow of information between the community and the city.

Committee/Board Members who dialog with the public will greatly reduce the surprise factor that occurs all too often. The city has open meetings but struggles with informative or inclusive meetings. The public is often a rough fit. Committee/Board Members who communicate with the public, will promote a better flow of information and improved participation because the public will be up to speed on issues when they are in attendance.

5. Review and, if necessary, revise current procedures for making appointments to City committees, boards, commissions, and other positions to ensure that the process is clear, consistent, and democratic and that appointments reflect the diversity of the community. Consider the following:

...(Make 3rd bullet more forceful) job descriptions for all committee and board members outlining their responsibilities to their particular committee.

...Such responsibilities should include city policy attendance & punctuality, demonstrating a clear understanding of the committees mission and goals, developing an understanding open meeting laws, displaying a basic understanding of documents pertinent to the committee or board, and A WILLINGNESS TO TAKE COMMITTEE/BOARD DISCUSSION INTO THE COMMUNITY.

BP, Thanks for all your hard work.

Jim Nash

To the best practices committee

I think the ten recommendations are good and a comprehensive list of the many items we can improve upon in local government. However there is one subject which is largely missing from the recommendations and is not in any real way addressed by the recommendations nor was it address during the course of the discussions of this committee. Smith college

Now some may think I am on a witch hunt here, but Smith college is a large independent entity that has direct and indirect impacts on so many aspects of our city and is a contributing factor in almost every public discussion for the following reasons

Smith college owns a lot of property

Smith college is a tax-exempt non-profit

Smith college has a lot of resources

Smith college employs a large number of people in a variety of capacities

Smith college is a cultural aspect of this city that is a part of many residents' lives

Smith college is an independent entity with no specific accountability to the northampton public at large

At a quick glance one can think of several situations in which Smith college is a contributing factor to a number of public policy issues

The highly controversial smith educational overlay district

The Business Improvement District (the participation of Smith college in the BID might singlehandedly validate the petition to form a BID)

Smith college could very well be part of a larger structural deficit in our tax base by being a tax-exempt organization (Smith college has an amount of land that has an estimated \$3,900,000 worth of tax value to the city for the property that is currently exempt; enough money to close the budget gap that might force a school closing, in addition to funding a transfer station in the absence of a landfill and we would still have leftover money)

On the other hand

*) Smith college employs local residents

- *) smith college collaborates with the city and its residents on art, education and community initiatives

- *) Smith college contributes to the image and culture of northampton as a progressive community and a tourist destination for Pioneer Valley residents as well as people nationally and internationally

- *) Smith College pays some money in lieu of taxes and contributes other money and resources to the public

- *) Smith college pays taxes on 10% or more of it's total property

However it is time we really analyzed what the total impact is of smith college on our city and what the future relationship is between the city and Smith college; I would like the Best Practices committee to make a new recommendation to add to the list that includes the following and I would like the committee to assign a high priority to it as Smith college has an impact on the city that has yet to be quantified or fully understood:

11)A analysis of the relationship between smith college and the city of northampton to be taken up by the next incarnation of this committee to include but not be limited to the following:

- *) A case study to be conducted by the best practices committee on this relationship

- *) An independent economic impact study to be commissioned with regard to Smith college and it's impact on the city of northampton. Additionally the committee should consider having the study be funded by smith college. The study should not be conducted by Smith college for obvious reasons, additionally the committee should consider excluding the five colleges as well and consider finding an entity to conduct the study that is not affiliated with one of the five colleges.

- *) At least one public forum on the relationship between smith college and the city of northampton

- *) The mayor's office should make available to the public on the northampton website all previous data and studies about Smith college with regard to payments smith makes in lieu of taxes, other financial contributions to the community and other in kind contributions to the

city or the community

*) Discussion of the formation of a town/ gown committee as it was referred to in Bob Reckman and David Narkewicz Best practices information summary collected from various other communities or an ongoing committee to examine, discuss, negotiate and/or maintain the relationship between smith college and the city of Northampton

Jesus Levy

Unfortunately, I was not able to stay until the conclusion of last night's JFK forum and I would like to add a few comments to the pile.

First...thanks and thanks again for volunteering for a seemingly thankless effort. You've suffered a few brickbrats here and there but the concept and product of the BP committee are just great. In my business we call this process the continuous improvement cycle and any quality organization (N'ton) submits to a regular dialogue and review to improve its practices.

I currently serve on the Planning Board and the Community Preservation Committee and previously with the Housing Partnership and Capital Improvements Committee. These experiences, along w/ an active role with the Leeds Civic Association, provides me w/ a reasonable lens to review your series of BP recommendations..... and let me say that they are 100% on target. If only we had a blank check and a basket full of new committed volunteers to implement your list of improvements.

A few of the BP recommendations that I specifically want to applaud include;

** Section #1

reviewing the Public Hearing process ... we need improvements so that everyone understands the meeting process & protocols and sufficient time is allotted for all parties to discuss and chew on the issues. The most satisfying and fair projects that are reviewed by the Planning Board are those where the developer has met w/ abutters and other parties prior to the Public Hearing. This scenario allows for a good give & take, close-up review of blueprints / drawings and some negotiations before the pressure and "stuffiness" of the Public Hearing venue.

** Maintaining an updated inventory of accessible, public meeting

spaces and clear procedures for non-City organizations to use those spaces. This will go a long way in fostering the growth of involved neighborhood and topic oriented groups.

** Section #3 ... improved transparency on City's fiscal details akin to the fiscal records of the CPC that are made available to the public

** Section #4 ... improvements to the N'ton website as more and more of us are accessing info this way in our daily lives. Perhaps there could be a short-term Ad hoc citizen, committee to review the website and make recommendations.

I love the idea of a big button on the home page for "VOLUNTEERS WANTED".

** Section #5 ... developing and then prioritizing an outreach process to recruit a pool of applicants for City appointments and committees especially recruits who may identify themselves as renters.

The only recommendation that I'm a tad nervous about is term limits on appointments to Boards. I understand that currently appointments and re-appointments are generally based on the Mayor's blessing. I agree that a good discussion on how to share this authority with the City Council is needed.

Also ... in my case, when I joined the Planning Board and Housing Partnership I had a very slim background in the technical aspects of the discussions that I participated in. It took at least a year of experiencing the mtg procedures, buzzwords & acronyms, and my role on the committee before I could confidently engage in the discussions and contribute to the decisions made by the group. A short term limit on Board appointments might jeopardize volunteers stepping forward who consider themselves technical novices but serve a purpose on the Committee as community reps.

So again, thanks mucho for devoting all your hours on this committee's work. I look forward to the review (and approval) by the City Council and the implementation of many of your recommendations.

George Kohout